

Chapter Twenty Five

HYBRIDITY AND HEGEMONIC RELATIONS: YVONNE VERA'S POSTCOLONIAL ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

In Yvonne Vera's first novel, Nehanda, she employs "spirit possession to recall and reconstruct an idyllic pre-colonial Shona past" and the onset of the ensuing conflict between her country and the colonizing country, Britain, during the later part of the nineteenth century. This paper examines and makes analyses of the writer's representations of the consequences of colonialism as she charts the rapid movement of her country away from the past glory of Great Zimbabwe in her subsequent novels, especially in Without A Name, Butterfly Burning and The Stone Virgins. It begins by explicating, though briefly, the salient features of the post colonial literary theory. It goes on to highlight and interpret Vera's varied exemplifications of the multiple problems that have emanated from the issues of hybridity and the hegemonic relationships that exist between the colonizer and the colonized. In the main, it argues that the problems associated with these constitute great dangers to the colonized people of Zimbabwe and to the Zimbabwean space. The paper discovers that, in all, the colonial encounter with the West, the post colonial upheavals and atrocities, coupled with the challenges of modernity, to a great extent, transformed the initial peaceful and traditional society profoundly. As a result, they impacted so much negatively on both the people's personal lives, the Zimbabwean nation and by extension the entire African space.

Introduction

It is imperative in this essay that we go back to the root of the term 'postcolonial' in order to understand it better, especially in the context of this paper. The words, 'colonialism' and 'colonization' according to V.Y. Mudimbe are derivatives from the Latin word 'colere' which means "to cultivate or to design" (315). Therefore, the words basically mean organization and arrangement. Udumukwu, Onyemaechi explains clearly that the words,

'Colonialism', 'Colonization' and the infinitive 'to colonize' indicate a significant historical fact. This fact crystallizes in the occupation of a territory by a foreign power, and the institution of a new system of authority moving its forces – military, intellectual, business – to rule over another by weakening the latter's claim to power. (315)

For the examination of the salient features of colonialism and its implications, we have to bring in the issue of ‘hegemony’ as a pertinent political concept. Explaining Gramsci’s theory of the state, Udumukwu points out:

There are two meanings of hegemony in Gramsci. First, it is a process in society whereby a fraction of the dominant social group exercise control through its morality and intellectual and cultural leadership over other allied fractions of the dominated social group whereby the latter relate to the former through consent. In the second meaning of the concept, it manifests itself in the attempts of the dominant social group to use its political and intellectual leadership in order to foreground its views of the world as the all inclusive and to shape the needs of the subordinate social group or groups. (316)

Essentially, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” is very relevant especially in the aspect where it makes a distinction between ‘literal political dominance’ and ‘dominance through ideas and culture.’ According to him, what is crucial with colonialism is the varied types of mechanisms of control which the imperial powers have introduced; mechanisms that do not only exercise historical control, but also mental and psychological control. It is a type of mental control that has far reaching consequences on the people and for this reason, particularly, the postcolonial theory, usually signals and addresses a crisis in knowledge which has been “produced by the end of the classic empires, the effects of which extends well beyond the moment of independence or initial decolonization” (Hitchcock 235).

In this relationship between the dominated and the dominant; that is, between the Orientals and the Occident (the West), Udumukwu goes further to highlight the inherent core issues by making reference to Said’s analogy with orientalism which he points out can be extended to colonialism in Africa. He explains:

Colonialism is predicated on the assumption that the colonized is knowable and can be tabulated and framed. It did not set out on the basis of similarity and solidarity. In other words, it did not see common ground, a ground of equality between the West and Africa. On the contrary, it was predicated on the basis of differences. It perceived the colonized as the ‘other’. (317)

It is primarily in this regard that issues which border on the ‘other’/‘otherness’ dominate the focal point for African literary artists, feminists inclusive, especially in their bid to reconstruct identity. The ‘other’ as Mary Mason indicates may be in the form of “person, place, community, idea, ideal, or language itself... in relation with whom or which the sense of selfhood evolves” (qtd in Zucker 124). She further buttresses the point that there is usually the “grounding of identity through relation with a chosen other” (124). Oftentimes, in Zucker’s explanation the “chosen other” is the community – its locale, values, people,

institutions, language (124). Examining the issue of the 'other' from the feminist perspective, Carol Boyce Daves explains that female characters in many postcolonies encounter their ugly experiences principally because the concept of 'nation' is a construct that has been formulated by the male. In his contribution, Zucker explains:

This totalizing vision of nation itself raises questions for those whose selves are constructed in oppositional, marginalized, or unharmonious relations to its patriarchal/patriotic structures and authorities – to what I call its “cultural patrix”. In the extreme expressions of nationalism – war and colonization – the prevailing power generates rules, codes and values for itself and for the defined 'other', setting all terms of behavior and self-identification. (125)

With regard to the historical experience of the peoples of Africa, it was with such perception of them as “the other” that the colonialists established their relationship whereby they exerted their superiority and supremacy over what they believed was the timidity and backwardness of the Black race. Ironically, in this relationship, the subordinates both resist and accommodate the domination. It is in this light that MacLeod explains:

Hegemony can be understood as a symbolic struggle, a negotiation over meaning that involves constraints on imagination, whereby ideology is not so much a tool in the hands of a dominant class as an enveloping version of reality in which all societies encounter are necessarily conducted. Such hegemonic struggles, and the accompanying constraints on political imagination, may be an especially common pattern in modern and modernizing cultures. Further, the constraints on imagination may tighten as local cultures are overtaken by mass-manufactured and Western popular culture. (555)

Expectedly, the word, 'postcolonial' germinated from 'colonial' and has been accepted by many to be an amorphous term that cannot be subjected to any precise definition. Literally, the term denotes that “which has been preceded by colonialism.” The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Second College Edition), defines the word as “of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony.” Generally, formerly colonized territories to which the term 'postcolonial' can be applied, have some basic characteristics which include that in such places, there is a long period of subjugation, there are problems of racism, there is an imposition of the colonizer's language on the colonized people, and there is resistance to the colonized power; that is, the colonized people make attempt to oppose the colonizer's power. Such opposition usually is seen in the development of anti-colonial nationalism, an example of which is the Negritude movement.

In light of the foregoing, postcolonial critique in different disciplines investigate varied areas of power relations in varying contexts which include the establishment of colonial empire, the consequence of the experience of colonization on political history, culture, economy and science; for instance, the effect of colonization on the cultural productions of nations that have been colonized and the provision of agency for people who are marginalized.

With regard to literature, post-colonialism is a current critical construct that has been conceived by present day critics in order to elucidate and evaluate works of art. (Nnolim "In Search" 14). An essential feature of postcolonial literature, which includes postcolonial feminist literature, is that it primarily seeks to address and analyze unjust power relations; that is the unjust interactions between the West and the colonized nations. Essentially, it is often engaged in a liberation process through the exposition of the dominating influence of stronger nations in European and American nations on the poorer nations of the world. The literature as well depicts the dominated peoples' efforts at resisting the strangulating hold of the Empire.

There are general views that are entrenched in postcolonial literature as the writers try to highlight their views concerning the African continent and her peoples. Central to these views is the belief that any African postcolonial society is essentially hybrid. "Hybridity", in Homi Bhabha's view, essentially denotes the presence of both cultures. Thus, in their creative works, the artists explore the various perspectives of the difficulties that have surfaced for the people from the new hybrid culture. Zeleza notes: "As creative works, they present fuller and finer social imaginaries of African worlds, more textured testaments of African problems and possibilities, values and visions" ("Vision" 14). He explains further that any postcolonial African state is in the following forms: "It is multiethnic, neocolonial, and has vigorously pursued an authoritarian developmentalist model. The apparent ambiguity of its current transition to democratic politics also seems ominously typical" ("Visions"12).

The sorry image of the inhabitant victims of colonization and their nations is expatiated by Zeleza when he describes them as "multi-ethnic, neocolonial and having vigorously pursued an authoritarian developmentalist model. The apparent ambiguity of its current transition to democratic politics also seems ominously typical" (12). He goes on to give this further explanation:

Nowhere is the multidimensionality, multi-focality, and multivocality of twentieth-century African literature more evident than in the postcolonial generation of writers born after 1960, whose creative flowering came in the 1980s and 1990s, the era of pervasive crisis for the postcolony and the triumph of postcolonial theory, both of which marked and mediated their work. ("Colonial Fictions" 13)

Based on the above premise, the postcolonial writers' major objective is to decolonize both the African environment and the African mind, accepting that these are imperatives towards the building of a strong independent and self-reliant continent. Rose Mezu highlights:

Thus inspired by Chinua Achebe, postcolonial criticism produced a new African intellectual elite, European-educated, effectively attacking Europe's presence and influence in Africa with Europe's won intellectual weapons. This resulted in a tradition of writings which focus on particular experiences, on collective national/continental identity on the fate of the individual unique subject within the collective, with that individual (such as Okonkwo) serving as the collective's consciousness. (334/335)

To this end, the writers primarily gear towards assisting the nations and her peoples in forging a new vision. They try to enhance the people's sense of nationhood; making consistent efforts to instill in them a strong sense of nationalism. So creatively, they paint a scenario of the environment and portray the negative influence of the contact of the two cultures on the people, leaving them at the crossroads. They try to explore to what extent the two cultures are reconcilable/irreconcilable. Particularly, they portray characters who live in such hybrid environment, depicting the impact of the environment on them and exposing how they grapple and negotiate the new complex space that has evolved; how they struggle to reconcile the differences. Often, the works are built on the hypothetical construct that the conflict of identity which faces a postcolonial citizen can generate disaster when it is not properly manipulated. But when well managed, according to Achebe, "one can draw strength and vision" for the benefit of the entire nation. Achebe goes on to explain that "the crossroads do have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple headed spirits, but also he might be lucky and return with the boom of prophetic vision" (*Morning Yet* 191).

What the majority of African literary writers and critics do not however accept is that the term postcolonial denotes the end of colonialism when we consider the meaning of the prefix 'post'. Hitchcock explains: "The colonial idea does not end with independence, with a different flag, or when an African leads an African nation. Within this context, the 'post' of postcolonial is woefully inadequate to the realities of contemporary Africa" (234). Christopher Okonkwo also points out that African writers "know that independence means neither satisfactory fulfillment of nationalist promises and mass expectations nor a complete end to colonization. African writers know [---] that while independence marks the end of imposed white rule, it remains the beginning and continuation of life's other journeys and crises" (70). Sally Keenan endorses these views when she says that "the post of that term should not be regarded as a sign that the processes of colonialism have ended; rather, their legacy continues to exist as a lived reality for many citizens" (46).

The term, therefore, equally embodies the concept of neo-imperialism which implies the continued powerful influence of colonial experience even when; for instance, in Africa, many nations have gained their independence. By extension, therefore, post-colonialism decries the nominal independence nature of many African countries which makes the people remain much relevant on the stifling dictates of the West. Today, because the African continent is a major 'beneficiary' of European imperialism, it is still heavily culturally and economically subordinated to the West. The indigenous governments have continued to pursue schemes, tailor their political systems to suit the interests of their former colonial masters. Similarly, economic policies are enunciated in obedience to the European capitalist market theory. As such, "African writers and intellectuals have grappled with the questions of cultural continuity and change, autonomy and dependency, uniformity and difference, ever since the tragic encounter with an imperialists, intolerant, and universalizing Europe" (Zezele, "Visions" 18).

Thus, postcolonial literature is not restricted to the literature that makes a critique of colonialism but also include works that indict the indigenous leaders after independence believing that the problems of many African countries after independence can be traced to the historical experience of colonialism. This is why in intellectual studies the period preceding independence constitutes a major focal point in evaluating the period after independence. Sage Wilson puts it succinctly when he says that "postcolonial thought refuses to wipe the slate clean." Hence, it does not ignore the past, believing that it is the past that illuminates both the present and the future. Encapsulated in the term is the hope that change would only occur when the old ideas that are incorporated in the historical past of the people's experiences are critically reviewed, re-evaluated and severed from colonialism with its concomitant hegemonic ideologies and practices.

Yvonne Vera, the Zimbabwean female writer, in her first novel, *Nehanda*, "uses spirit possession to recall and reconstruct an idyllic pre-colonial Shona past" and the onset of the ensuing conflict between her country and the colonizing country, Britain, during the latter part of the 19th century. Through the presentation of an organic image of that past, she, in essence, "attempts to effect a reversal of the racist terms that have been used in colonialist narratives" (Vambe, 29) as well as subvert the history being appropriated by male nationalists in Zimbabwe. In the subsequent novels, she represents the consequences of colonialism as she charts the rapid movement of her country away from the past glory of Great Zimbabwe. Implicitly, she invites her readers to accompany her through the urban cities, through the general colonial and postcolonial environment in order to experience the dire consequences of the country's contact with the West and the impact of post-colonial atrocities on both the nation and on the people's personal lives. She shows to us the great shift, the tremendous changes that occurred; the sad gliding away from the valley that "was spacious and surrounded by mountains covered with lush grass." She explores how the mountains and

rivulets that “flowed filling a small lake in the fertile valley in which fishes of various kinds swam” had turned to be the valley that “is no longer green with birth. Its grass is dry, and the sediment of memory swallows boulders of grief” (*Nehanda*: 60).

It is primarily the writer's exploration of these complex consequences of colonial rule which essentially embodies the evolving of new consciousness that this paper sets out to examine and interpret.

Vera's Portrayal of Postcolonial Zimbabwe

In Vera's second novel, *Without A Name*, she tells the story of a young girl Mazvita, who decides to escape to the city after she has been raped by a soldier fighting in the liberation war. She departs her war-torn village, Mubaira, in the hope of leaving her nightmarish experience behind her. When she later arrives in Harare without an identity she stumbles on Joel and becomes his live-in-lover. But ironically, the past catches up with her when she finds out that she is pregnant. The ensuing experiences of her life are what Vera presents as an inevitably inherent conflict between the past, the present and the future. Thus, the rest of the novel deals with how Mazvita tries to reconcile the conflicts of her life; her different efforts at navigating the crossroads. Her dilemma is made more complex, more puzzling and perplexing, because of the nature of her new environment.

Though the novel focuses primarily on the personal life of this female character, it is also from here that Vera begins to explore the derailment of a whole nation and its people. Bull-Christiansen, in making reference to Bonnevic, explains that in *Without A Name*, “modernism as well as traditionalism is viewed from a critical perspective in Vera's descriptions of the war torn landscapes and cityscapes [---] The city does not offer freedom; on the contrary, [she] experiences emotional decay and spiritual poverty. The city is a place which lacks memory. Vera's description of the city can be termed an urban dystopia” (25).

Essentially, *Without a Name* focuses particularly on the disturbing developments of 1977 in Zimbabwean history – three years before the country gained independence in 1980. Vera informs us specifically, that in “1977, people were known to die amazing deaths. Natural deaths were rare, unless one simply died in sleep” (*W.A.N* 87). She makes further elaborate descriptions of the nature of the year in other ways:

- It was 1977. It was nothing to see a woman with a blind stare on her face, with a baby fixed spidery on her back. It was nothing to be sorrowful. The city was like that. There was a uniformity about suffering, a wisdom about securing your own kind of suffering, your own version of going forward. The idea was to go forward, even those who had died in the streets knew that, they crawled toward the alleys. Death properly executed could be mistaken for progress. (*W.A.N*: 43)

- 1977. It was a time for miracles. If you arrive at your destination still living, then you prayed desperately to continue to live. It was hard in those rural landscapes. There were all kinds of horizons witnessed, all kinds of sunsets. The sky was embroidered with new suns, for it burned even in the middle of the night. The sunsets were brilliant and unimaginable. A war has amazing sunsets.
1977. Everyone was an accomplice to war. (87/88)

It is in these ways that she encapsulates the major features of the war – a demented and chaotic environment; a period when people “welcomed silence” (88) and suffered “without an audience” (113), without anyone to communicate with or share their burden with for “the war made them strangers to words. They shaped any truth which comforted them. The war changed everything; even the idea of their own humanity” (88).

One of the ways through which Vera depicts the resultant effect of colonial rule on the people is through music. Thus, we find that music constitutes a significant pervasive feature in her work especially in *Butterfly Burning*. The Kwela is an indigenous music that could be likened to jazz. Robert Muponde describes it as “a circular, pulsating township music which traces the journey of the migrant on the train to the city; his lived spaces and aspirations” (‘Roots/Routes’ 19). Meg Samuelson explains it this way:

Kwela takes its name from the injunction to “climb up” into the police van, an injunction often consequent on infringements of pass laws and influx control regulations – in short, of restrictions of mobility; it suggests again the desire for mobility born of, and partially contained within, prohibition and geographical violence. (“Yvonne Vera’s Bulawayo” 26)

With regard to its similarity to jazz music she goes on to illustrate:

On each rim of the circum-Atlantic world, jazz operates as a medium through which to mediate and manage a cruel colonial modernity; it does so partially by imagining alternative cultural roots and routes that both embed subjects in *and* cut across the contours of European modernity. (“Yvonne Vera’s Bulawayo” 26)

In different scenes in the novel, the writer tells us that the people “dance with joy that is free, that has no other urgency but the sheer truth of living, the not-being here of this here-place” (86). We are told also, “the music. It makes for a bargaining and temporary sort of self-love. Everyone free, the young joyful” (37). Further in the story, we find the women as they

...beckon and sing lilting body songs which splice the air with a coarse and comforting spasm and place their hands on their heads where the sun has been beating all afternoon like a drum. Longing for the decency of night and the forgiveness of stars, their lips repeat tunes from the guitar, its string snapping its rhythm. (87/88)

For the people of Zimbabwe, Kwela music is not just a source of mere entertainment. It is also a medium through which the people seek succour. It is their healing balm, a source of solace and refreshment. It serves as their escape route, helping them to grapple through the numerous burdens of their lives, while shielding them also, though momentarily, from the security agents – making them enjoy some sense of freedom and offering them a measure of reprieve from the stiff demands of their society. Hence, it “brings a symphony of understanding, then within that, other desperate confusions. Poverty prevails over innocence. In such times a song is a respite” (7) We also hear that it “issues out of the joy of living and out of the pain of the ‘desperate wounds’ animated by each experience and memory of rupture and uncertainty, betrayal and alienation” (Muponde, ‘Roots/Routes’ 20).

Through the language of the music, we are compelled to appreciate the creative ingenuity of the people and also become aware of the intensity of their suffering as a colonized group. Their sad and humiliating experiences, particularly the treatment they received from their colonial masters are all incorporated within the music. Thus, Muponde buttresses Samuelson’s earlier view when he says, “Kwela music is about the brutality of the police. It means “Climb and Move!” into the police jeep, with a booted foot slamming into your back. The knees down and baton falls across the neck and shoulders” (‘Roots/Routes’ 19). It is to find a replacement, a dousing effect for such abuses as above that they resort to bargaining, albeit, temporarily, “a sort of self-love” by making extra efforts to appreciate their persons and enhance their worth as human beings during those moments in spite of the many varied ugly conditions of living that surround them.

Thus, while the Kwela music lasts, they are transported psychologically away from reality. Conscious efforts are made to stifle the real as they sway in a frenzy manner through the make-belief world which they construct. As Vera puts it, “As for healing, they have music, its curing harmony as sudden as it is sustained. [---] Within this music, they soar higher than clouds; sink deeper than stones in water” (*Butterfly* 5). From this paradoxical statement, it becomes evident that ultimately no enduring healing takes place. Rather, they get more frustrated when at the end of it all, they degenerate further and are forced to face the reality of their existence.

A vital group of people which Vera directs her lens on in order to exemplify the extent of damage that has been done to the people are the children of Zimbabwe. She gives great prominence to them in her different narratives most probably, because both their persons and the nature of their growing up often receive great attention within the African tradition. Maxwell Okolie highlights the fact that the period of growing up for the African child is “a period of initiation of the child into the mysteries of nature and existence” (32), stressing that “basic to [African] culture, history and destiny is the childhood that the African passed through. Whatever civilization is to be edified or history to be perpetuated is deeply rooted in it. [---] Childhood is therefore the foundation stone on which our life is constructed” (30).

Therefore, in *Butterfly Burning*, for instance, Vera portrays the children of Zimbabwe as they are immersed in the colonial rot which she portrays. This is graphically illustrated in the life style of the street urchins we find on Sidojiwe E2. We watch them as they play in the midst of the rubbish emanating from their colonial lords that include “an empty box of matches. A single leather shoe with laces attached [---] An inkstand that says London. A magnificent metal spool with a dove embossed. On it, Selborne Hotel is written along the broken handle of a ceramic pot” (19). We further hear that in “Sidojiwe E2 the children sit on empty, rusted metal drums and talk of cars passing along Jukwa Road, a street of tarmac which stretches longer than they can see. They find rainbows” (16).

Vera explicitly draws our attention to the type of junks that litter the environment with the use of appropriate adjectives. Expectedly, the junks comprise “empty bottles, broken old umbrellas and broken cases”. We find such other items as “bottle tops”, “empty bottles”, “empty, battered cases of Olivine cooking Oil” (17). In addition to “Bicycle tire”, “zinc sheets, a car door” (17). Equally, “Inside the shelter of rusted metal are true treasures which provide relief. In these abandoned drums which have seen both rain and sunshine, a broken record rests, its sides chipped, and its black surface plastered with dust. The paper label is torn” (18/19). The children play with discarded tins of sardine which they do not know where they come from or who has made use of them. All these items are strange to them; they cannot even guess their source or what they are used for, coupled with the fact that they are damaged and therefore cannot be of any use to them. As Meg Samuelson notes, “Fashioned out of the debris of modern, urban life (children playing in the streets of Makokoba produce its melodies out of abandoned bottles and cartons)” (“Yvonne Vera’s Bulawayo” 26). These items make profound statements on what goes on in this society. They are, in addition, indicative of the nature of the oppressive and empty life that people live. The children are isolated, neglected beings who desperately make efforts to clutch at the “every essence of living”.

Vera goes on to depict a typical relationship that exists between the colonial authorities and the “other” through exposing the condescending attitude of the colonizers towards the children:

[The children] hold their eyes against the tight brightness of the sun reflected on the metal and read the number plates on the cars with awe, constantly astonished by the sight of white men with lingering gazes and hasty waves. Waving at them with hesitant limbs. (16)

Unfortunately, it is such distanced and unreciprocal gestures which smack of arrogance and unhealthy relationship that the children internalize as they grow up. Another side to it is that this is the type of strange people who African children grow up to idolize. As Philip Emegwali laments: “Our children are growing up idolizing [foreign] heroes with whom they cannot personally identify” (10).

The extremely abused environment where the children are bred is also brought to the fore. The waste of industrialization which constitutes part of the everyday life of the children is represented in this way:

Along Sidojiwe E2 is a long ditch which carries from the factory on the other side of Jukwa Road. This ditch is black with sediment, a viscous factory water, [---] going past and flowing over the other side Makokoba, pouring into the Umguza River. (20)

The writer also has his say: “Oil breaks the light on the surface of the water in the ditch, stagnant and breeding – a swarm of insects hums incessantly like a hostile cloud” (20). Another debilitating scene is elaborately painted this way:

Sidojiwe E2 sees the fire blaze the sky as the oil tank bursts at the factory site and the men working underneath are swallowed in the blistering flames. The children abandon all thought of their play and watch through the fences; they have seen the fire first and imagine that a special ceremony is being enacted for their benefit. They neither run away nor make a sound, instead their fingers tighten along the diamond mesh of the fence and they hold on as the explosion beats against their bodies and threatens to turn them to ash, they can feel the warm air pushing against them like a current, the fires glaze the sky like a dream, billowing with dark fuming smoke which builds a mountain in the sky, thick and blocking the sun for as long as they stand there, and in an instant they are separated from something vital, some memory which has engrossed them before this, some harmless activity, some child-nurtured

desire about the unfolding of time. They tighten their grip. If they let go they would tumble into an unknown abyss. (*BB* 21)

The destructive tendencies inherent in all these scenes cannot be underestimated. They are what distort the past natural beauty and desecrate the land that is represented, for instance, in the soothing quality and serenity of the Umguza River. On a daily basis, the children and others grapple with this highly dangerous and insecure environment. While the squalor poses multiple health hazards, the other consequences of the unbridled capitalist tendencies of the colonizers such as the constant explosions from the numerous mines that litter the colonized space are death traps to both the African miners and their children who are part of the volatile vicinity. Like the elders, “they too examine misfortune” (18) while “Their lips are dry. Their voices splinter like dead branches” (18). The children cannot find their voices. Even when they attempt to speak, their voices cannot be heard amidst the rubbles of the prevalent anarchy and disorderliness.

And to compound issues for the children, they can no longer identify their parents who have fallen out of place having imbibed the mannerisms of the city and acquired a lot of societal colonial clichés. Their parents can only now “manage to greet each other in English saying hallo, easily, as though hallo is not at all an English word. It is part of being here. Jim...Baas...Jim...Baas...Jim...Baas” and “who now bear names like Sixpence, Tickey, Teaboy, and Lucky” (*Butterfly* 53). Sad enough, the expected role models the children are expected to look up to and the elders they should respect are now looked upon with disdain and subjected to ridicule:

The children in the waiting rooms see this truth and it amuses them to endless mimicry. They take torn cotton sleeves which they tie into a band across the eyes, then call for Jim. Jim answers from under the benches, from behind the shoulder, from behind the garbage cans, from everywhere but where the small arms are reaching out to find him. So Baas knocks against the benches and hits against the walls and the darkness. (53)

It is because of the distorted images who respond to them from every wrong direction that these “small arms” cannot identify their supposed elders who ought to lead and direct them. Consequently, they are confronted with the ensuing darkness of a blind alley; they can only grope blindly and would eventually get destroyed. The endangered species that they are, there is no one to lead them into the “hidden ‘treasures that [will give] them a sense of completeness and perfection which colonization [is] actively busy divesting them of” (Okolie 31). Okolie goes on to expatiate on the nature of these “hidden treasures”:

Most children grow first of all in the rural world where the white man is rare and where African civilization and tradition still retain their strong natural flavor, moral foundations and human significance. Nature all round the child becomes not just a 'friend and companion', but an open book, a mentor, an encyclopaedia of knowledge at the child's disposal. The sky and its clouds, the stars at night, away from the glitter and artificial lights of the cities; the wind, the fauna and flora, the birds, everything has its message, its lessons from which the child benefits through an uncanny art of interpretation acquired living close to nature. (32)

The extinction of these treasures is what Vera is lamenting because they are no longer seen by children growing up in the contemporary urban societies in Africa.

The vivid presentations of children in such light can best be interpreted as iconic images. Vera resorts to the employment of them first, being aware of the power of such iconic illustrations to stir empathy in the readers. Second, she carefully exposes the process through which a particular set of citizens who are of immense value and futuristic relevance are destroyed. She allows her readers to decode the underlying message. It is not unlikely that she wants us to view the destroyers of these children as iconoclasts since she perceives them (the children) as sacred beings. Their destruction in actual fact is an abomination. For without them, nations would experience a vacuum without any hope of continuity. As Fumbatha rightly observes towards the end of the novel, in the absence of the children, the streets become barren, dark and portend danger as he "walks faster into the welcoming distance. As he moves on, he notices that the remarkable difference on Sidojiwe E2 at that time of day is not the degree of light over the roofs and hedges, but the absolute darkness that exists because there are no children playing. The children, encased in sleep and dream, are truly missing and Sidojiwe E2 is not the street he knows" (131). Although metaphorically represented here, the children who are bred in this type of surroundings have been inflicted with psychic wounds of far reaching consequences. With an already demented psyche and a distorted world-view, their lives and dreams have been smothered; they are truly not existing entities; they are only living in a sort of limbo.

Vera is implicitly saying that the greatest resources of any nation are the people, particularly the young members of society. It is therefore the responsibility of the leaders worth their salt to make sustained efforts to tap these resources. She, indeed, perceives children as the key players when it comes to the solid development of a country. The future definitely belongs to them since the "tomorrow" of the country is solely dependent on them. It is in this light, primarily, that Vera exposes the nature of life children are exposed to in contemporary Zimbabwe. She strongly believes that their present environment has nothing concrete and rewarding to offer them except the demeaning of their self-worth, the killing of their aspirations and the crushing of their dreams. For her, a bright future can only be assured

when the children are allowed to grow up in an ordered environment, when they are given the right education, when they are given the opportunity to nurture their imagination in the right direction and create their own future. And it is also of vital importance to connect the children appropriately to their own roots. Bringing the present dispensation into critical perspective, it becomes obvious that the children can never be well-equipped to enable them to grapple with the challenges of the future.

It is for these reasons that Vera admonishes her people for watching helplessly as the budding talents of their children were being wasted, their world-view impaired, and the notion of their country being negatively impressed on their young minds. She abhors the tremendous ways the negative forces of the Zimbabwean society shape the future and destiny of the children. Bull-Christiansen draws our attention to the fact that the writer “uses the child’s perspective” in order to focus “on the child’s experience of the liberation war and life in the townships that were not directly part of the war but still were affected by it” (26). And this is another of Vera’s passion as a feminist postcolonial writer.

The *Stone Virgins*, published in 2002, is Vera’s last novel. It is equally an echo of Zimbabwe’s disastrous encounter with colonialism and extensively paints another contrasting ugly picture that typifies the contemporary Zimbabwean condition. The novel depicts the Matabeleland political crisis that erupted after the 1980 post-independence elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power. The political tensions, bitterness and rivalry led to the accentuated violence that was perpetuated by the black rulers, in particularly Matabeleland, from 1981 through 1986. During this period, thousands of people were killed, many tortured while villages were burnt down.

The novel is divided into two historical periods: 1950-1980, a period that stands for the decades of colonial rule under Rhodesian government and for the Wars of Independence. The rest of the novel records the outrageous post-independence events that occurred between 1981 and 1986. Bull-Christiansen remarks: “The two periods into which the novel is divided [---] represents the narrative of the nation as divided into a united and a divided period. Before 1981 the national hopes and dreams were still intact, the ‘rain’ – the spirit of the liberation wars was opening the eyes of the people [---] but after 1981 the rain does not come” (90).

Thus, in the first part of the novel, Vera depicts this heightened hope of the people as they anticipate the emergence of independence:

A burden lifts as a new day appears this new day. A place to start again, to plant hope and banish despair to be restored. Everything has changed. Day is

light, not heavy; light as a leaf. [---] They sing earth's songs that leave the morning pulsating. [---] All that is bright among them as brighter still: the sky, the altars of Gulati, hope. A wind sweeps through the hills, their voices, their bodies in chorus. (45-46)

She goes on in the second part of the novel, to portray how the people's high expectations have all been unfortunately dashed. Everything turns out to be a grand illusion; the expected rain that will usher in a more fruitful and fulfilling life does not come. The attendant pessimism and disillusionment is illustrated metaphorically when she says: "Fruit has been falling off the marula tree endlessly and now the rains are near, if there are going to be rains at all, that is last year again the maize crop withered and left a starved and violated population even more bewildered. There is no harvest" (117). It is in fact the lack of fruitfulness, the absence of anticipated harvest that Vera explores extensively.

In this novel, the settings, particularly the landscape and the general environment, constitute integral parts of the entire novel. At the beginning of the novel, Vera invites us to admire the alluring and enduring landscape that is typical of Bulawayo's Selborne Avenue, "a straight unwavering road, proud of its magnificence. The first half, beginning at the centre of the city, is covered with purple jacaranda blooms. Vibrant"(3). We are also told that "Selborne is the most splendid street in Bulawayo and you can look down it for miles and miles with your eyes encountering everything plus blooms; ..." (4) We hear again that "Selborne Avenue is straight and unending, it offers a single solid view, undisturbed" (5). Ironically, this beautiful, magnificent flower-concentrated street is part of the highly disorganized, confused, disjointed and incoherent society that is saddled with unprecedented violence – violence especially against women and against one another generally. Within this space, there is a prevalence of rape incidents and unbridled destruction – arson, burning of villages and farm lands, immense atrocities – so much killings, so much bitterness and unfriendliness, agonizing sadness, heart-rending experiences and excruciating pains. It is a land where there is no longer decent behaviour – replete with the indecent attitude of the men especially against women. The destruction in the land comprises physical destruction, the destruction of, and the assault on the people's psyche. From another perspective, it should be understood that the city has been purposely structured in this way by the colonialists in order not to provide a hiding place for the indigenous people, and in addition, to make it easier for them to monitor their every movement. Meg Samuelson explains:

The city operates as a disciplinary technology of surveillance whose spatial geography contrasts with rural Kezi's "narrow meandering footpaths leading in and out of every homestead" (Stone 24). Far from being sketched wholly negatively, however, the city is celebrated for the "anonymity". ("Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo" 23)

It is this more significant aspect of the destruction of the people's psyche that Vera exposes from the very beginning by presenting simultaneously the natural beauty of the land epitomized in the streets vis-à-vis the naming of the streets after such British colonizers as "Jameson Road (of the Jameson Raid), through to Main Street, to Grey Street, to Abercorn Street, to Fife Street, to Rhodes Street..." (3), and English poets "...Kipling, Tennyson, Byron, Keats and Coleridge" (5). Vera, in these respects, is highlighting the point that in spite of the fact that many African countries have gained independence, a new mode of imperialism still persists since, as Peter Hitchcock puts it, "...the post of postcolonial is not only a fiction but "pernicious" because "the colonial idea does not end with independence, with a different flag, or even when an African leads an African nation" (234). It is in this respect that she emphasizes the fact that the bulk of what is prevalent in the postcolonial Zimbabwean society is a new brand of colonialism that is very antithetical to the African traditional mode of life. What is seen is the plantation of a new nation by the whites thereby effacing almost completely the original identity of the nation. Meg Samuelson highlights this point:

The Stone Virgins opens with an extended mapping of the colonial city that points to the geographical violence performed by the town planners. Cutting their grid-like street structure into the landscape and, through naming, creating place as a chronicle of colonial rule, they produce "space as alienation". ("Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo" 23)

Thus, these namings could rightly be seen as imposed palimpsests of an alien superstructure on the before now African traditional foundation. They are strong enduring markers that make it possible for "imperialist nostalgia" (Renato Resaldo 1993 in *CALEL*, 20) to continue lingering long after the nation has gained its independence. In other words, it is inadvertently, a very lasting manner of imposing a new version of colonialism which will be very difficult to uproot and besides, it impacts considerably on the people's psyche. There is glaring evidence to show that in spite of the fact that the nation has gained independence, the colonizers are still so much around. Moreover, they are clear indications that the people are not yet free; they are not yet liberated. Equally, there is evidence to show that the damage caused by colonial rule has not yet been dealt with.

In *Without A Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Vera uses the habit of skin bleaching to illustrate another form of distortion, effacement, and rape of the land. The characters who engage in bleaching are branded as "the Ambi generation" (33) in *Without A Name*. Hemmings aptly describes *Ambi* cream as, "the licensed trademark for the commercial brand of skin care, many of which contains chemicals to lighten the colour of one's skin" (173). She goes on, "Skin- bleaching creams such as *Ambi*, removes the natural pigmentation of the skin. The process is one of reduction rather than addition, destroying the pigmentation present and

disrupting the creation of further pigmentation” (174). Thus, we find in *Butterfly Burning* that Vera describes Phephelaphi's skin as “luminescent from creams” (98). The underlying paradox of this seeming glow is revealed when Hemmings informs us that “skin, in its altered and distorted state, does more than conceal the original colour, it illuminates a core that cannot be concealed, a place where racism has successfully penetrated and disrupted self-worth” (182). He then goes on to show that bleaching does not in any way enhance beauty. Instead, it only succeeds in exposing the “ugliness of racism” (Hemmings 184). Therefore, the skin that is “luminescent from creams” is deceitful as it does not emit any true light, it does not radiate and there is no shine. It is, in fact, bereft of beauty. Commenting on this issue, though in a different context, MacLeod poignantly notes: “Hegemonic relations, conceived in this manner, indicate that [these women] must be deluded about their true interests and duped into behaviour which reinforces their own subordination; they are victims of a ‘false consciousness’” (544).

When Vera represents the indulgent characters we meet in these two novels, the narrator berates them for their lack of vision and misplacement of priorities:

But here they had not inherited the blood of foraging white masters and therefore worked hard to achieve the fine Afro hair. Men heated metal, close-toothed Afro combs and lifted their hair from the scalp; the women who already knew freedom was purchasable, walked into glittering *Ambi* shops and bought their prepared Afro wigs. Thus clad, they asserted an inchoate independence. Independence was memory and style. Black had never been as beautiful as when it married slavery with freedom. (*W.A.N* 55)

Vera admonishes some of the people of Zimbabwe for their erroneous notion of what it means to be free. She decries their sense of distorted freedom describing it as freedom that came in circles. Endless and dizzying. What was freedom if it could be curtailed and contained and passed around? Freedom was a thought tantalizing and personal, you had to wear your own freedom to be sure it had arrived. 1977. That was how it was expressed. People walked into shops and bought revolutions. If your revolution was white, and wide, then you had circled your dream, made a complete revolution more definite than the sun. (*W.A.N*, 55)

We have earlier seen this wrong perception of freedom in the novel since the writer had told us that it is a type of freedom that

spoke from deep questions, no one understood what freedom truly was. To be sure, it was boisterous. *Ambi* would do for now, certainly. No one questioned the gaps in reality. If there was a gap anywhere, there was an opening too. Freedom was any kind of opening through which one could squeeze. People

fought to achieve gaps in reality. The people danced in an enviable kind of self-mutilation. (W.A.N, 32 & 33)

The writer bemoans the fact that after all the struggles for independence, with the attendant extensive loss of lives and the depletion of the environment, the people have not only trivialized but made nonsense of their hard-won freedom by indulging in such frivolities as skin bleaching, transforming the texture of their hair, abandoning their traditional names, imbibing Western clichés and resorting to everything foreign. They have been easily carried away and have failed to make any concrete and sensible form of preparation in order to restore the country to its former glory except to indulge in mundane pursuits through which they feel they can revolutionize society. Ironically, they have only engaged in a type of revolution that revolts instead against their own race because they are only protesting against their own colour and traditional ways of life. It is a type of revolution that is damaging to their race, their identity and their worth as human beings. These forms of mimicry amount only to cheap escapism and a celebration of “a self-willed mutilation” (Hemmings, 176) in that they give them a false sense of belonging as well as a deceitful sense of fulfilment. And these are obviously wrong ways of ‘wearing’ or asserting their own freedom.

Through the exposure of such mannerisms and ugly practices, the writer, here again, provides us with an insight into the state of the people’s false consciousness – a consciousness that is misleading and equally portrays the characters as a group without a purpose in life. All these have, no doubt, arisen from a demented vision and contradictory state of mind.

Furthermore, Vera highlights the tragedy of trying to mutilate the prestigious African identity which the people ought to be proud of. Through bleaching the skin, the characters are indirectly erasing the essence of their Africanness. By so doing, they are obliterating the quidity of what is truly African, removing what protects them, what gives them their identity. Their entire personalities are consequently altered. Jessica Hemmings compares the human skin with cloth and explains that just as the latter, the skin serves these purposes in humans: “protection, modesty, identity” as well as delineating margins. She elaborates further that “conscious and unconscious alteration to either surface can be read as an attempt to control and even redirect the identity through which the world judges, celebrates and discriminates against” (176). Hence, this erasure constitutes the acceptance of inferiority, and this is in addition to the fact that it makes the people vulnerable; it leaves them without any protective shield or distinguishing mark of recognition. The writer moreover uses the act of bleaching as a metaphor for the rape of the African space by the Western World for which the indigenous people are also accountable. She informs us:

The people had been efficient accomplices to the skinning of their faces to the unusual ritual of their disinheritance [---] They had lain in rows in the searing sun while their skin fell from their faces, pulled and pulled away.

Here Vera, as well, mocks her people's blind mimicry of the white people who expose themselves under the hot African sun in order to tan their bodies.

Bleaching the skin is also indicative of the cultural ambiguities already created in these individuals. Hemmings's explanation is quite illustrative in this regard. She writes:

Ambi –as a prefix means “both” or “on both sides” (OED). It appears in words such as ambiguous, which is defined under subjective usage as “of persons: Wavering or uncertain as to course or conduct; hesitating, doubtful” [---] and ambivalence, which is defined as “the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes [---] Hence, the commercial name Ambi refers to a sense of doubling or multiplicity”. (173 &174)

From the above explanation, it should be made clear that the habit of bleaching the skin clearly highlights the psychic dilemma the characters are entrapped in. Vera has employed this in order to depict it as one of the signs that expose the difficulty that is experienced in a postcolony when people mediate between two cultures. Oftentimes, the course of navigating the crossroads in a cross-cultural context ends up producing individuals with dual personalities – people who are between and betwixt – neither here nor there; people who are neither black nor white. Hemmings goes on to tell us that “Visually, it is from skin that the outward self is revealed to the world. Skin that has undergone bleaching projects two selves into the public world: the fabricated and the natural” (177). Unfortunately, most times, it is the fabricated self that plays the predominant role in the lives of the individuals.

Vera portrays another aspect of this situation through the two female protagonists of *Without A Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Mazvita and Phephelaphi respectively. Just as their “torn and skinned bodies [---] represent a perforated and fragmented sense of self,” their state of being can be extended to the generality of the people of Zimbabwe. And it is for this major reason that Vera asks the question: “was it a surprise then that they could not recognize one another? Ancestors dared not recognize them” (33). It is this breakdown in relationships among the people, the loss of touch with the ancestors and the excision of the people from their traditional roots that are some of the weighty concerns which Vera persistently addresses in her novels.

It should be highlighted that the continuous adherence to these colonial passions and unhealthy obsession for ‘Englishness’ speaks volume as regards the dominant traits that rule

the consciousness of the people in most postcolonial societies. These mental behaviours and pursuits eventually sediment into both the obliterating of indigenous identity and eroding of cultural values. The blackman's mental notion that his identity can only be defined and forged from the precepts, habits and standards of Western culture and world view, is disturbing because it is undeniably a "very effective [way of] cultural silencing" (Bhattacharji 137). Vera is of the view that a society without its own indigenous, distinguishing marks or characteristics, and in the absence of well defined, articulated indigenous cultural values and traditional practices, has its ontological security seriously jeopardized. Bhattacharji goes on: "a society in such a state of cultural chaos naturally cannot be expected to form any civilized institute of governance and/or justice" (137). It is because of these far-reaching consequences that Bhattacharji again notes: "All histories from the margins voice today, this strategy of erasure, be it overt or covert, implemented by the colonizer/settler in all socio-geographical terrains, be it Africa or Australia, tribal or aboriginal" (137).

In all these, Vera is frowning at the way her people have mismanaged their hard-won freedom. Her representations suggest that freedom should not be sought and gained for freedom sake. Instead, freedom when won, should be cherished, protected and internalized as part of a people's existence. She tells us, "That is how naive they were about freedom. Freedom was round and smooth and yellow, an earthly version of the sun, handheld. But who ever heard of a handheld freedom? Yet each sought an egg laid with only them in mind, laid right into their palm, warm, wet, soft" (*Without A Name*, 54). Therefore, she condemns in strong terms her people's cultivation of such injurious colonial passions that constitute a new type of imperialism that have been very effectively entrenched as significant forms of post-colonial Zimbabwe. She castigates her people for being a people who inherited everything negative from their colonial experience except infusing themselves with "the blood of foraging white masters..." and as a people who only perceive independence as being just "memory and style" (W.A.N: 55). She admonishes their inability to critically question and examine whatever that was offered to them by the colonial masters since according to McLeod, "in a post-colonial context, any images derived from the West are politically and culturally suspect" (555).

Implicitly, the writer decries the many such ways Africans humanize the Western world while at the same time, albeit, unwittingly, demonize Africa and her peoples. For her, it is senseless for Africans to eulogize and celebrate those who had humiliated them, impoverished them and worse still, damaged their psyche. She believes that the street naming, the practise of bleaching the skin, the imbibing of other Western mannerisms denote psychological defeat. They are all profound ways of internalizing defeat. Very unfortunately, they are pronounced avenues through which the people express that they have been subsequently conquered by a foreign and supposedly superior culture.

The predominance of restricted areas has been so repetitively highlighted by Vera that when they are harnessed, we arrive at a motif that underscores the stultifying, life-denying, off-limits-designated places that inhibit her characters' self-fulfilment. What she offers in this regard can best be illustrated with the city of Bulawayo, especially in *Butterfly Burning*. The novel, written in 1998, chronicles life as it was lived in the urban cities in colonized Southern Rhodesia in the 1940s. The novel represents the chaotic and disorderly conditions that were replete with the type of life that were lived during the period particularly in the city of Bulawayo. Bull-Christiansen highlights:

The city of Bulawayo plays an important role in her novels. It is always at some level present in the landscape that forms the backdrop of her stories, and portraying the city and its surrounding landscape has been one of the driving forces behind her writing. (8)

Muponde describes this setting as “a place which could be theorized as emerging or becoming” Bulawayo (‘Roots/Routes’). While Vera tells us that “Bulawayo is this kind of city and inside is Makokoba Township [---] Sidojiwe E2, the longest street in Makokoba, is fresh with all kinds of desperate wounds. Bulawayo, only fifty years old, has nothing to offer but surprise; being alive is a consolidation” (BB 6). We are also informed that the city is where

The people walk [---] without encroaching on the pavements from which they are banned. It is difficult, but they manage to crawl to their destination hidden by umbrellas and sun hats which are handed down to them for exactly this purpose, or which they discover, abandoned, at bus stations. They understand something about limits and the desire that this builds in the body. (BB 6&7)

All over the city and elsewhere, the attendant racial discrimination is so much pronounced with such obvious bold legal restrictive signs as, “NO BLACKS” and “WHITES ONLY”, especially in public places like taverns. The environment is replete with numerous segregated areas that have been fenced off, the inhibiting barbed wire enclosures portraying the prevalent unfriendly relationship and the glaring class distinction that has been created between the colonizers and the “other”. Vera exposes in *Butterfly Burning* the children who “...stand aside, flat against the barbed wire fences” (17). In *Without A Name*, Nyenyedzi laments: “The land is enclosed in barbed fences, and we sleep amid the thorn bushes in the barren part of the land. We live in fear because even those who fight in our name threaten our lives” (39). It is also revealed:

Ekoneni is a rendezvous, a place to meet. You cannot meet inside any of the buildings because the city is divided; entry is forbidden to black men and women; you meet outside buildings, not at doorways, entries, foyers, not beneath arched windows not under graceful colonnades, balustrades, and cornices, but *ekoneni*. Here, you linger, ambivalent, permanent as time. You are in transit. (*The Stone Virgins* 10)

We equally find this unfriendly disposition of the colonial lords who are often seen “in every police jeep patrolling the city streets [---] with batons ready to use them” (*BB* 47). Further in the novel, we hear of African veterans who have come back from the Second World War, having fought for the British! They return unappreciated and already displaced from their original community. Vera here depicts their sense of loss, deprivation, and the surrounding air of uncertainty in this way:

The men returned. Some. As soldiers, not heroes, blind with mistrust and dizzied by an evident defeat which belonged only to their particular experience. From 1945 they could be seen walking down the road in Makokoba glazed and perplexed by the events of the war. [---] Whether they could walk on pavements or not was still being debated [---] They still could not walk on pavements [---] Through this, through another harm and insight, they strove to be heard. (*BB*: 91)

Pointedly, it is an environment where fear is a major pervading feature and a place that holds the black citizens hostage. While depicting a people in bondage, it also exposes a system that has been put in place by the imperial government in order to establish the difference, to checkmate and to disempower. Robert Muponde points out that in the novel, “The codes of exclusion are bold and legible. It is an order-saturated place, in which movement imitates behaviours in militarized zones” (‘Roots/Routes’ 21).

He also draws our attention to the other “regulated colonial spaces” of the restrictive, stultifying world which we find in the novels. These include the one-room apartments and relationships with typical examples of the one-room love affair between Phephelaphi and Fumbatha in *Butterfly Burning* and that between Mazvita and Joel in *Without A Name* as well as the residing shacks whose walls are ‘thin like lace’ (‘Roots/Routes’ 21). He explains that “the sense of imprisonment and suffocation is captured in ‘One room. Solid bricks walls. Asbestos and cement’ of Phephelaphi and Fumbatha’s living space, and the repressive presence of unwanted and unwilling surveillant voyeurs” (‘Roots/Routes’ 22). Through the narrator, we are told:

The walls were thin. Fumbatha and Phephelaphi were aware of the thin distance between their breathing and the next room, their thought and the next, their suppressed voices and the room not theirs, their surrender. They knew too that their sighs and harmonies had witnesses as bold as stars. (48)

These cocooned spaces have been depicted by Vera in order to exemplify how the black people are entrapped in the prison of capitalism that is strangulating and excruciating.

While commenting on these imperialistic legacies of oppression, that include Africans living in the margins, at secluded locations having been dispossessed of their lands, Udumukwu argues that it is a grand design of the colonizers to push “others” to the margins. He explains:

The term “margin” and its variants, alterity, the other, the stranger, have deep philosophical roots that go back to Plato's *The Sophist*. It is observed that in Plato, the stranger participates in a dialogue on the ontological problems of being and non-being [---] Within the context of post-colonial theory and discourse, Gayatri Spivak has defined margins as “a principle of identification through separation”. (“Borderlines” 374)

What is pertinent in this regard is that Udumukwu is highlighting the dubious reversal of authority; of power, as the owners of the land have become the strangers; they have turned to be the “new settlers” excluded from their own land and only living in locations which essentially mean living at the “margins”. He goes on to point out that in a postcolonial nation like Zimbabwe, “Land is not simply a faction of economics. It is a source of power that is of ability, control and authority. Land, also, is not just a thing. It is the basis for defining a new form of relationship between people” (377). The entire scenario is more worrisome when according to him, we are aware that such ‘locations’ have not arisen out of “the consequence of war or natural disaster. In a general sense, social injustice, social violence forms a *sine qua non* for borderline conditions in post-colonial Africa” (376). In other words such colonial arrangements have been established in order to foster “the principle of separation [---] fashioned by realities of existence in the post-colonial context.” (374).

A major consequence of this type of space that “is coloured by the restricted movements powered by discrimination” (Hemmings 177), is that the cities have turned out to be places where the black inhabitants experience great loneliness. The cities of Vera's novels are lonely societies where the characters experience the alienating impact of colonialism. They are lonely and isolated beings and are alienated from their environment. In *Without A Name*, the protagonist Mazvita is in the midst of people, and in spite of all the noise around her, “she breathed the poverty and the loneliness, the black walls tarnished and buried with the cries of

abandoned dreams...” (25). We also find men like the character Joel who live discreet lives. In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera depicts the “solitary and quiet inhabitants of Kezi” (117). In *Butterfly Burning*, the female character, Deliwe, expresses her longing for visitors in this statement: “Everyone is allowed to have visitors” (60). In spite of her continuous brutality by the police, she, like other characters, is always anticipating company. The people are always desirous of partnership, for real companionship. There is, indeed, an abiding craving for fellowship with others with whom one can truly share one’s experiences, one’s dreams and aspirations.

Another dimension to colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe that Vera presents is the extent to which the people have been polarized. In *Without A Name*, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins* she portrays two distinct African groups – the rural inhabitants and the modern people. The writer employs a contrastive method to differentiate one from the other. For instance, in *Without A Name*, the rural Mubaira is contrasted with the urban capital Harare, and the rural man Nyenyedzi, who refuses to be separated from the land and is grappling to come to terms with the startling development around him bemoans:

No one can take the land away. To move away from the land is to admit that it has been taken. It is to abandon it. We have to wait here. [---] We keep the land for the departed. That is why we can work on the land while strangers believe it can belong only to them. How can something so vast and mysterious belong to anybody? (38)

In *The Stone Virgins* also, the rural community of Kezi is contrasted with the city of Bulawayo which is about two hundred kilometers away.

In addition, Vera addresses the prevailing changing relationship between the African people as she finds in the development of class groups. She views the issue of classicism as constituting a fundamental restructuring of African society by the colonizers, and explores the inimical consequences of such class consciousness for the African people. To this end, she brings to the fore a major feature of urban cities that is not in synch with the African communal way of life. She points to the fact that it is an alien, having been introduced by the colonial administrators who created divisions within the hitherto holistic traditional society by constructing areas for the upper and lower classes in the urban towns. She depicts it as not only an unhealthy aspect of urbanization that has led to the decomposition of African societies, but also as another dangerous way of imbibing the colonizer’s cultural norms.

African communalism, as Stageman explains, “implies a standard of value of submergence. [---] In traditional African societies, the role of each citizen is to perpetuate the status quo, to

assure continuity of the clan, to work with tradition” (qtd in Katherine Frank 46). In Vera's subsequent novels after *Nehanda*, she depicts the eventual breakdown of the communal life and communal spirit. In *The Stone Virgins*, for example, she uses the marula tree to evoke nostalgic feelings in the people:

The marula tree. They hold on to its fecundity, and indeed, its past memories. After all there is nothing else left communal since the day Thandabantu Store blazed down. Kezi is a place gasping for survival; war, drought, death, and betrayals: a habitat as desolate as this is longing for the miraculous. (118)

Apart from the loss of communal life and communal spirit that is illustrated here, we find another major consequence of the wars, which has brought in so much desolation and impoverishment. The marula tree of old was a symbol of fertility, progress, and a unifying cultural point. In contemporary times, the land has lost not only its fertility, but also its propensity for enterprise. It has been turned into an arid and sterile space in which one can hardly survive. Even in the present dispensation, the Thandabantu Store which was in the form of a marula tree, in that it was a place of congregation, a previous converging spot and an umbrella under which the people assembled to exchange greetings, hold discussions and share experiences, as well as serving the purpose of a vital commercial nerve point, has been burnt down by the dissident soldiers who brutally massacred the shop keeper and other villagers. That was the last straw. As Annie Gagiano comments,

Such a death as the shopkeeper Mahlatini's “would not be registered” in the annals; even in dying he is aware that he is nothing to the soldiers taking his life and that their razing of the heart of the Kezi community, Thandabantu Store, is something they have already “forgotten” even as it burns down behind them (122,123). (71)

The destruction of the Thandabantu Store is obviously a major disruption in the lives of the people. Gagiano goes on to uphold the view that Vera

denies the validity of any military-political or sociological rationale to (particularly) the Matabeleland conflict and, although recognizing the inevitability and validity of the earlier anti-colonial, anti-racist uprising known as the second Chimurenga, [she] is predominantly aware of the seemingly unbridgeable cleavage which any war almost always establishes between combatants and civilians – even those supposedly on the same side. (72)

In her profound critique of colonialism, therefore, Vera explores these crucial dimensions of colonial and postcolonial rules in order to buttress the interplay between power and

powerlessness as well as highlight their disintegrative effects. This essentially accounts for her preoccupation with exploring the post-colonial anomie, investigating the varied nature of the impact of colonialism on Zimbabwe as one of Africa's colonized countries.

Conclusion

According to Gikandi, the contact with the West, "for many, African societies [---] was tantamount to what E. Abbas has called a veritable revolution, over-throwing a whole ancient world of beliefs and ideas and an immemorial way of life.' European societies confronted local societies with the difficult choice 'to adapt or perish" (55 & 56). This is what essentially propels Vera as a feminist postcolonial writer to expose what went wrong and where they did not do it right. She expresses the view then that it is no surprise that things have gone the way they did, leading to the disintegration of their culture and the dislocation of the general society.

In sum, Vera's novels, apart from *Nehanda*, essentially handles in great details the impact of colonialism on the African space, exploring how it has profoundly transformed her society especially with the challenges of modernity. Hence, she concentrates mainly on the depiction of the chaos and disorder of township life which is a major characteristic of many postcolonial cities. The townships represent both the colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwean environment that has been ravaged by war. And for Vera it is a society of excesses, one so precarious and highly prone to danger. We are exposed to a deeply distorted society, a morally-debased, puzzling and highly demanding space. It may be right to say that these narratives are the summing up of what she believes is the totality of colonial misrepresentations.

Kaarsholm is of the view that the underlying purpose of such pre-occupation by African writers like Vera is essentially "to present the colonial period as a continuous process of destruction of a rich African cultural heritage and a progressive demolition of African self respect" (qtd in Bull-Christiansen 53). Simon Gikandi also notes that "colonialism, especially in its radical transformation of African societies, remains one of the central problems with which writers and intellectuals in Africa have to deal [with] [---] taking stock of the colonial situation and its impact on the African psyche" (54&55). As such, Vera's novels are included in the "...African writing that emerged in the postcolonial era, a literature shaped by the pressures of 'arrested decolonization' and pitfalls of national consciousness..." (Gikandi 55).

It is predominantly the loss of culture that Vera frowns at while equally indicting her people for not been wary enough to recognize the disastrous implication for tradition when it comes in contact with modernity, coupled with her people's inability to protect their cherished

values and environments. Ultimately, her major submission is that the multiple and complex problems, coupled with other challenges which the majority of African countries have been grappling with for many decades now, even after independence, stem from the strangulating contact with the West.

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makes it memorable and penetrating.*